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INFO RUCNCCAN/ALL CANADIAN POSTS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 000713

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CCA DAVID MCFARLAND

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TAGS: [ETRD](#) [ETTC](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CU](#) [CA](#)
SUBJECT: CANADA AND CUBA

REF: A. STATE 52541
[¶](#)B. OTTAWA 694
[¶](#)C. OTTAWA 628
[¶](#)D. OTTAWA 294

OTTAWA 00000713 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[¶](#)1. (C) Based on Embassy's ongoing dialogues with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's Director General for Latin America and the Caribbean, its Deputy Director of the Central America and Caribbean Division, and the Cuba deskoff, Embassy's assessment is that Canada has consistently and conceretedly worked to promote the advancement of democracy and human rights in Cuba. Most recently, then-Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier issued ref b statement in recognition of the May 21 Day of Solidarity with Cuba (full text repeated in para 8). More generally, Canada shares the U.S. goals of promoting democracy and human rights in Cuba, while maintaining a policy of "principled engagement" with both the Cuban government and dissident elements, which Canada believes allows it to have a positive impact on human rights and democracy in Cuba. Canada maintains a diplomatic presence in Havana and conducts aid programs worth about C\$10 million/year.

[¶](#)2. (SBU) Furthermore, Canada has engaged and intervened on behalf of human rights and the advancement of democratization in Cuba a number of times over the past six months:

-- Canada was a co-sponsor of the US-EU Prisoners of Conscience Declaration, and participated in efforts to lobby other UN member-states to support the resolution. Through its co-sponsorship of the resolution, Canada expressed its support for the release of prisoners of conscience throughout the world, including in Cuba;

-- Canadian and Cuban officials meet regularly to discuss the harsh treatment of dissidents. Conversations are reportedly "firm and frank;"

-- during recent visits by the Canadian Agriculture Minister to Cuba and the Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister to Canada, Canadian officials delivered "stern" messages on the need to protect human rights in Cuba (ref c);

-- the Canadian Embassy sponsors Canadian Studies Centers in several locations in Cuba to inform the general populace about life in a democratic country with a market-based economy. A wide range of literature on human rights and democracy is available in these centers. The Canadian government also regularly sends speakers to these venues, as well as funds economics professors teaching modern economic theory at the University of Havana;

-- the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), a Canadian government-funded think tank, maintains an active series of programs on Cuba that focus on support for dissidents and democratization. It has a comprehensive program for documenting all Cuban government actions against dissidents, supports an active dialogue on planning for the post-Castro area, and assists civil society programs on human rights and democracy;

-- then-Minister Bernier on February 19 expressed Canada's hope that the leadership transition in Cuba from Fidel Castro to Raul Castro would "open the way for the Cuban people to pursue a process of political and economic reform" (ref d).

¶4. (SBU) As reported in ref c, recent high-level diplomatic visits between Cuba and Canada have included:

-- Cuban First Deputy Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, accompanied by Ministry of Foreign Affairs North America Division Director Josefina Vidal, visited Canada May 4-7. Rodriguez met with senior officials from various Canadian government agencies. According to DFAIT, the meetings were "frank" and included discussion of human rights issues, while Deputy Foreign Minister Len Edwards delivered a "stern" message on human rights;

-- Canadian Minister for Agriculture and Agri-Food Gerry Ritz visited Cuba April 21-24 and raised human rights concerns with Cuban interlocutors;

-- the Canadian Senate's Sub-Committee on Population and Health visited Cuba in January 2008 as part of its study on the social determinants of health;

-- Canadian Associate Assistant Deputy Minister of
OTTAWA 00000713 002.2 OF 002

International Trade for Global Operations and Associate Chief Trade Commissioner Robert Dery attended the Havana International Trade Fair in November 2007;

¶5. (U) Canada is one of the largest foreign investors in Cuba. Canadian natural resources company Sherritt International is one of the world's largest investors in Cuba. Sherritt engages in mining, oil, and gas production as well as electricity generation, and soybean processing in Cuba. Canadian companies operate in a variety of sectors of the Cuban economy, including tourism, construction, agriculture, bio-technology, and mining. Canadian exports to Cuba in 2007 were estimated at C\$ 563 million (USD 524 million). Main exports are machinery, electronic equipment, motor vehicles, as well as copper, iron, and steel products. Canadian imports from Cuba were estimated at C\$1.06 billion (USD 988 million) in 2007. Primary imports are tobacco, books and newspapers, and seafood.

¶6. (SBU) Canada has no bilateral trade agreements with Cuba. During his visit to Cuba in April 2008, however, Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz and his Cuban counterpart renewed an existing MOU on technical cooperation in agriculture.

¶7. (U) Canada does not have any formal exchange programs specific to Cuba. The Canadian government maintains a Canada-Caribbean Community Leadership Scholarship Program offering university students scholarships for short-term research exchanges, for which students from across the Caribbean -- including Cuba -- are eligible to apply. In addition, many exchanges occur informally between organizations such as high school sports teams and cultural groups.

¶8. (U) May 21 statement by then-Foreign Minister Bernier:
quote

Canada's links with the people of Cuba go back many years. Indeed, Cuba was the first Caribbean nation selected by Canada as a location for a Canadian diplomatic mission.

Canada engages Cuban society through our diplomatic presence which is aimed at helping to lay the groundwork for a Cuba that upholds freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This is in keeping with our renewed engagement in the Americas.

Canada continues to monitor developments in Cuba closely, and we are concerned about the plight of political prisoners, especially those suffering from poor health. It is our hope that recent shifts will open the way for the Cuban people to pursue a process of political and economic reform.

end quote

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